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# **Intercultural education of tolerance and hospitality**

Maria Dasli

This paper aims to make a theoretical contribution to the current debate on intercultural education by focusing on the nature and limits of tolerance. Drawing on contemporary theorisations of the concept, it is suggested that while tolerance appears fundamental for confronting issues of difference, it has several caveats. The paper discusses the caveats in relation to differences that do not always co-exist harmoniously within the same society, and argues against the view that tolerance brings about automatically positive results to those who practise it. In the light of this argument, I propose that the ethics of hospitality, as elaborated by Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000), may provide a more viable approach to accommodating cultural difference, and conclude the paper with the implications for intercultural education. Specifically, I show that intercultural education has clung too long to the normative goals of modernity, and suggest that in order to go beyond these goals one must bring the ethical relation of responsibility for the other to the fore.

Keywords: intercultural education; tolerance; hospitality; Derrida and Dufourmantelle; cultural difference; responsibility

## **Introduction**

Against a backdrop of accelerating globalisation, transnational mobility and migration, there has been in recent years a significant growth of interest in cultural diversity within the context of schools and classrooms. Leading supranational bodies have become more responsive to the needs of culturally diverse pupils, and Gundara (2000) reports a rapid rise in standard-setting policy documents that together present an intercultural approach to education. While this approach is notoriously difficult to explain, partly because of the lack of any unity in the definition of the term ‘intercultural’ (for a discussion see Meer & Modood, 2012), a closer look at these documents reveals that intercultural education promotes the understanding of different people and cultures. Indeed, as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has put it in one of its fundamental pieces,

The premise of much intercultural education is to provide all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations. (2006, p. 37)

Along similar lines, the Council of Europe (2011, p. 8) sees intercultural education as ‘a fundamental prerequisite for the functioning of democratic societies’, and identifies two interlinking competences that should be taken into account in all intercultural debate and practice. Whereas the first competence refers to knowledge of social groups and their products and practices, the second makes mention of the ability to operate this knowledge under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction (Byram, 2003). Bleszynska (2008) believes that these competences enable students to understand the links between their own lives and those of others, while Luciak (2010) contends that, without the acquisition of intercultural competence, people are less likely to engage in tolerant contact with one another.

At the same time, relevant research has also suggested that the stated aims of intercultural education are not always realised in practice. Kymlicka (2003), for instance, notes that the theory of intercultural education is developed alongside practice, and that practice often focuses on the more exotic and colourful aspects of a culture. Similarly, Coulby (2006) asserts that much multicultural curriculum content reduces complex cultures to a few safe items (e.g. food, costumes, etc.), but moves on to argue that because policy documents have a tremendous impact on pedagogic practice, the problem can be resolved somehow. His argument is echoed by Zembylas (2011), who conducted ethnographic research on the relationship between tolerance and peaceful co-existence in one public school of the Republic of Cyprus. This study acknowledged the powerful impact that policy has on practice, and described how Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-speaking students shared school space. More importantly, however, the analysis also showed that living side-by-side is not always an indication of acceptance, and that the assumption about a naturalised link between tolerance and

co-existence might well be problematic. As Bauman has pointed out, over 20 years ago,

[Tolerance] does nothing to save the 'tolerated' from humiliation. What if it takes the following form: 'you are wrong, and I am right; I agree that not everybody can be like me, not for the time being at any rate, not at once; the fact that I bear with your otherness does not exonerate your error, it only proves my generosity'? Such tolerance would be no more than just another of the many superiority postures. (1992, p. xxi)

Other scholars (e.g. Furedi, 2011) have drawn on UNESCO's (1995) Declaration on the Principles of Tolerance to problematise the concept, and suggest that 'intercultural education must navigate without the assured moral compass of tolerance to guide it' (MacDonald & O'Regan, 2013, p. 1010). Regrettably, however, this suggestion has attracted little interest from policy makers to date, and, therefore, additional conceptual work is needed for the further development of the subject (Gonçalves & Carpenter, 2012).

With this in mind, my aim in this paper is to contribute to the growing body of literature on intercultural education. But, rather than focusing on current conceptualisations of the subject, which have been much debated by scholars and practitioners alike (Coulby, 2006; Gundara, 2000), the main goal is to concentrate on the nature and limits of tolerance. Drawing on contemporary theorisations of the notion, the paper suggests that while tolerance appears fundamental for confronting issues of difference, it has several caveats. I discuss the caveats in relation to differences that do not always co-exist harmoniously within the same society, and argue against the view that tolerance brings about automatically positive results to those who practise it. In the light of this argument, I propose that the ethics of hospitality, as elaborated by Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000), may provide a more viable approach to accommodating cultural difference, and conclude the paper with the implications for intercultural education.

## **The nature and limits of tolerance**

Tolerance, in its broadest sense, can be understood as a moral attitude or virtue, which enables people with different ways of life to co-exist peacefully within the same society (Walzer, 1997). Galeotti (2002) and Creppell (2003) contend that it is an individual disposition, used to describe a character or person, who is on the whole capable of suppressing what is disliked or disapproved, but nonetheless chooses not to do so. McKinnon (2006; see also McKinnon & Castiglione, 2003) elaborates several definitional features of tolerance that may help identify tolerant people. She argues that people are genuinely tolerant when they refrain from interfering with an opposed other in situations where they enjoy significant power, and when the stronger party has a serious objection to the disliked behaviour. Cohen (2014, p. 2) defines tolerance along similar lines when asserting that it is ‘the intentional and principled refraining from interfering with another whom one opposes’, and, as such, proposes that for tolerance to count, agents must value their non-interference (Cohen, 2004). Other scholars (e.g. Furedi, 2011; Zembylas, 2011) choose to highlight what tolerance is not in order to critique a common, established idea that the attitude is synonymous with the enthusiastic acceptance of difference. In doing so, they concentrate on contemporary public discussions of the concept in which the connection between tolerance and judgement is in danger of being lost.

In addition, most of the aforementioned theorists claim that tolerance must have limits, because there are some deviant forms of conduct which cannot be tolerated. Indeed, Galeotti (2002) and McKinnon (2006) believe that it is difficult and even impossible to tolerate such wrongdoings as ‘homicide’, ‘rape’ and ‘robbery’, and suggest that the attitude be armed with a practical set of constraints for the sake of a well-functioning society. Cohen (2014) adopts a similar position when arguing that

normative principles can help determine what should and what should not be tolerated. In explaining why, he directs attention to the work that John Stuart Mill (1859/1991) had undertaken in *On Liberty*, a now seminal essay around which many debates over intolerable behaviours arguably revolve. Here, Mill formulates the so-called harm principle, which suggests that:

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. (1859/1991, p. 14)

Much of the inspiration behind this principle, Miller (2010) explains, is derived from the idea of social tolerance. This is concerned to protect individual autonomy from those who do not have the ability to respect another person's beliefs or group membership within a democratic framework, and, as such, engage in an intangible form of 'tyranny', which, for some toleration theorists (e.g. Forst, 2003; Kennedy, 2000), can be more dangerous than many kinds of state oppression. To combat this form of tyranny, therefore, Mill (1859/1991) stipulated two necessary conditions for the legitimate interference of society with intolerable practices: first, that the intolerable practice is *other-regarding*, and, second, that it is *harmful*. Self-regarding actions ought not to be interfered with for Mill as long as they do not affect others (see also McKinnon, 2006).

Central to these two conditions is the freedom of thought and discussion. Defined by Mill (1859/1991, p. 22) as 'a set of precautions against one's own fallibility', freedom of thought and discussion enables conversation participants to exchange 'error' for 'truth' in matters that they take to be important or significant. King (1998) believes that this exchange involves some kind of appeal to what makes people's lives go best, and suggests that when people discuss a topic of mutual

interest, they start with a common perception of morality that determines what is likely to bring about the greatest amount of good. His suggestion accords with the perspective held by McCarthy (2000). This scholar maintains that morality is a useful case to start with, but moves on to argue that problems arise when discussants bring two competing moralities into the conversation. According to him, these moralities permit each person to attach greater weight to his or her own interests, rather than to the interests of everyone else, and, as such, present a range of options through which a particular morality can be exercised. Mendus (2000) explains that this presentation necessarily requires one to take a position on a number of controversial issues that may not always appear defensible to all discussants, and argues that when dilemmatic cases make their presence in conversation, they encourage participants to re-arrange the order of competing moralities.

However, the view that participants will re-arrange the order of competing moralities has been challenged in a number of ways. One rather straightforward criticism is that opinions are not delivered calmly under the circumstances of real life, and that real life presents controversial instances of intolerable behaviour that no rational society can fully condemn or criminalise (Williams, 2000). To explain what such instances might include, McCarthy (2000) points to the use of human embryos in laboratory research. He argues that while this research offers hope for new medical treatments, it does not necessarily benefit the embryos themselves. So, how are we to draw the limits of tolerance in this situation? Another example, from the field of religious studies, has been offered by Holtug (2002), who studied the relationship that *The Satanic Verses* (cf. Rushdie, 1988) have with individual liberty. This study concluded that the harm principle protects individual liberty on too narrow a basis, because the very circumstances that make freedom of religion possible fail to specify



what this freedom precisely requires. The assumption here was that although the book violates the basic values to which some Muslims subscribe, other concerns should outweigh the policy of interference that the novelist arguably suffered.

The issue of competing moralities has also preoccupied scholars, who fail to see a clear distinction between other-regarding and self-regarding harms. Jones (2010), for instance, notes that the two types of harms are related very closely to one another, and that harming oneself can cause harm to others. Similarly, Saunders (2010) argues that there remain important ambiguities with the self-/other-regarding distinction, and that while the two categories may appear opposite to each other, they contain many actions that can affect the interests of both the agent and others. Lacewing (2008) provides one illustrative example – i.e. mountain climbing – that helps clarify the perspectives of the aforementioned scholars. He argues that mountain climbing is a dangerous sport to pursue in so far as it hurts the person pursuing it, and directs attention to two ways that show how this sport can inflict harm on others. Whereas the first way points to the inherent risks of rescuing the mountain climber, the second refers to the medical treatment that the same person will require as a result of his or her injuries. Lacewing explains that one may appeal to these effects when arguing against the climbing of mountains, and poses the question of whether the sport should be banned so that the welfare state can spend the funds required for the treatment on something else.

Another criticism targeted at the Millian approach to discussion is that free speech inflicts psychological distress on those who have not, as yet, learnt to live with disagreement. Indeed, as Warburton (2009) argues, the open exchange of opinions can often leave conversation participants emotionally injured, as the function of much argumentation is to convince others of the truth, or acceptability, of what ones says

(Billig, 1991). For Parekh (2006), the negative effects of free speech can be predominantly seen in ethnically mixed communities, which deny equal respect and moral worth to members of racially defined groups. Race researchers (e.g. Fanon, 1952/1986) have in fact suggested, a few decades ago, that some targets of racist language internalise their negative image or adopt majority values and habits of being in order to secure access to certain social resources. And Goldberg (2009) has, more recently, pointed out that such language might even lead to premature death. Dasli (2014), who conducted case study research with one young black woman in the south of England, presents an interesting perspective on this matter. She argues that minorities regain their moral worth when finding support from majority group members. In her report, however, she also emphasises that when discrimination is at issue, whether verbal or not, tolerance should definitely be excluded.

Perhaps, the last criticism targeted at Mill's (1859/1991) seminal essay *On Liberty* relates to the ideal of individual autonomy. Hollenbach (2002), for instance, points out that individual autonomy places too much of an emphasis on the pursuit of one's own goals and objectives, and, as such, neglects to consider the importance that social relationships and dependency have for human life. Bretherton (2004) has also discussed the one-sided attention that individual autonomy pays to human life, further arguing that such an attention requires all agents to divorce themselves from their particular communities in order to operate as independent and rational beings. A similar view, from the perspective of intercultural education, has also been offered by Endres (2002), who believes that the development of individual autonomy does not allow students to see their cultural norms in relation to those of others. This author concludes that the effort to treat all students equally in principle may result in unequal treatment in practice, and advises liberal educators to take the history of a particular

learner into account. His advice has, however, made little, if any, direct impact on related intercultural education initiatives, whose own sets of pedagogic practice seem to see individual autonomy as the only possible way of achieving peaceful co-existence (Balint, 2010).

This section has considered the nature and limits of tolerance in relation to differences that do not always co-exist harmoniously within the same society. It showed that while tolerance is a useful tool for protecting the ways of life of each individual from social disapproval, there are limitations to its usefulness. The limitations are not necessarily derived from contemporary theorisations of the concept per se, but from the situational contexts in which people are encouraged to engage in acts of tolerance. Even if one takes the Millian harm principle as a guideline for setting the limits of tolerance, the question of what counts as harm arises in practice. My aim, therefore, in the next section is to propose a more viable approach to accommodating cultural difference, and to discuss how the ethics of hospitality, as elaborated by Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000), may work to this effect.

### **The ethics of hospitality**

In their seminal essay *Of Hospitality*, Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000) distinguish between two discontinuous and radically heterogeneous orders of hospitality that exist in a paradoxical relation to each other (Derrida, 2005). The first order, which they call absolute or pure hospitality, welcomes whomever or whatever arrives unconditionally in that it does not involve the exchange of something of value in the context of agreed conditions, neither is it practised out of duty. Instead, as Derrida and Dufourmantelle put it,

Absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home [...] to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come,

that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. (2000, p. 25)

Moreover, such hospitality entails an ethical relation of responsibility for the other that precedes and exceeds the freedom of the host (Caputo, 1993; Westmoreland, 2008). Indeed, Derrida (1997a) has suggested that the ethical relation to the guest is the condition of absolute hospitality, because it receives, without concern for self-protection, the one who can take over the house through force. His suggestion is echoed by Lévinas (1981), who associates absolute hospitality with the passive exposure to offence. He argues that when hospitality is structured in a relation of responsibility for the other, the host is already prepared to endure gratuitously the ‘persecuting obsession’ of the guest in the very same place where he or she takes up residence. In this sense, the host accepts the possibility of every sacrifice for the guest, thereby becoming not only host but also ‘hostage’ of the other:

It is indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage – and who really always has been. And the guest, the invited hostage, becomes the one who invites the one who invites, the master of the host. The guest becomes the host’s host. The guest (*hôte*) becomes the host (*hôte*) of the host (*hôte*). (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 125)

For Lévinas (1984), the idea of being held hostage by the guest marks a move towards the absolutely Other or God. This is because, as he states, ‘I can only go towards God by being ethically concerned by and for the other person’ (p. 59). Davis (1996), who has offered a helpful analysis of this statement, explains that the central purpose of concern here is not to bring the other into the self’s sphere of familiarity, but to preserve its alterity from an irreducible distance. More specifically, he argues that contrary to most Western philosophy in which the aim is to incorporate that which lies outside, Levinasian thinking requires the separate existence of the self and other as fundamental to human living. Otherwise, both self and other would become an object of knowledge that would reduce all identity into sameness. Similarly, Derrida (1999) asserts that the potential of hospitality in this statement rests on the capacity of the

host to welcome, without horizon of expectation, that which is completely ungraspable and unknown, and compares the other to the Messiah who is yet to come. In this comparison, he differentiates his position from grand religious doctrines, which are arguably open to the coming of a fixed and identifiable Other, in suggesting that the Messiah always remains indeterminable for him (Deutscher, 2005).

The second order of hospitality, which Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000) distinguish in their piece, is called conditional hospitality. Unlike its pure opposite which allows guests to behave as they wish, this second order of hospitality posits a limit to what one can offer or do, both on the personal level and on the level of the state, so that the other turns into

[...] someone with whom, to receive him, you begin by asking his name; you enjoin him to state and to guarantee his identity, as you would a witness before a court. This is someone to whom you put a question and address a demand, the first demand, the minimal demand being: "What is your name?" (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 27)

In explaining the key idea behind this quotation, Dufourmantelle (2013) points to the different meanings that the word 'question' has in modern French. She argues that because in modern French this word also means 'torture', the phrases of 'posing a question' and of 'putting somebody into question' are very closely related. Derrida (1998) agrees with this explanation when affirming that both phrases contain some degree of torture, and goes on to suggest that in conditional hospitality one is forced to speak the language of the majority. This language, as O'Gorman (2006) explains, inflicts violence for Derrida, because in addition to extending hospitality on its own terms, it also deprives guests of the homeland that they hold close to heart. Indeed, in *Of Hospitality*, Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000) define what is commonly called mother tongue as 'the ultimate homeland', and describe how exiles feel when they are asked to address a question in an unfamiliar language. From this perspective, Derrida (2000) concludes that hospitality is a self-contradicting concept that both jeopardises

and enables one's capacity to host another, but argues that because there is on-going debate as to how exactly this capacity is jeopardised and enabled, the concept remains mysterious to some critics (e.g. Sweetman, 1999).

In response to his critics, Derrida (1997b) goes on to trace the etymological root of the word 'hospitality' to the Latin *hospes*, and to suggest that because the Latin *hospes* is formed from *hostis* – i.e. (hostile) stranger – and *pets* – i.e. to have power – there is always some hostility built right into the idea of hospitality, constituting what he calls 'hostil/pitality' (Derrida, 2000). So, '[w]hen I say "Welcome" to the other', Derrida (1997b, p. 111) explains, 'I am not surrendering my property or my identity', but 'I am [rather] renouncing my mastery' so that my guests feel 'uncomfortable and afraid to touch a thing'. However, in what he moves on to argue, it becomes evident that this feeling of discomfort and fear is not a negative thing for either the guest or the host. Indeed, Derrida (1997b, p. 111) suggests that keeping guests under control is essential to hospitality, because 'a host is a host only if he owns the place, and only if he holds on to his ownership'. Similarly, in *Of Hospitality*, Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000) assert that there must be a law of limited hospitality governing the relationship between host and guest. For, if such law is absent, the house will not constitute the space of a habitable home, precisely because the host will have already become 'hostage' of the other.

There is, therefore, a deep-rooted paradox in the ethics of hospitality, which, on the one hand, requires a giving to the other without expectation of return, and, on the other hand, demands a set of limits so that the host retains his or her ability to offer hospitality. And yet while this paradox makes hospitality impossible, impossibility is not meaningless. Because, as Derrida (1997b, p. 111) himself has put it, 'the possibility of hospitality is sustained by its impossibility; hospitality really

starts to get under way only when we [...] travel or go through [...] *the impossible* (the im-possibility of hostile-pitality)'. To claim, therefore, that absolute and conditional hospitality are separable from each other is to assume a simple logic contradiction that divorces hospitality from its undecidable nature, and obliges one to make a choice between the two orders. 'Any particular right to hospitality', says Honig (2013, p. 97), 'takes its motivation, its energy, and its animation not just from a finite economy of right, a moral law, universal human right, or a particularist ethics, but also and problematically from the infinitude of the unconditional hospitality that is both expressed and betrayed by any proclaimed table of values or by any enacted right to or gift of hospitality as such'.

I now turn to the implications for intercultural education as a way of concluding the paper.

### **Towards a re-construction of intercultural education**

Perhaps, the most important implication for intercultural education that can be drawn from this paper lies in the difference between tolerance and hospitality. Indeed, Derrida has asserted that:

Tolerance is actually the opposite of hospitality. Or at least its limit. If I think I am being hospitable because I am tolerant, it is because I wish to limit my welcome, to retain power and maintain control over the limits of my 'home', my sovereignty, my 'I can' (my territory, my house, my language, my culture, my religion, and so on). (2003, p. 127-8)

Previous intercultural research has also highlighted this difference when suggesting that the two concepts are not direct equivalents. Bretherton (2004) and Zembylas (2011), for instance, have suggested that tolerance runs counter to the imperatives of hospitality, and that while both deal with ways of embracing the other, the actions that emanate from tolerance are very different to those of hospitality (Borradori, 2003). The present paper echoed this suggestion, and further placed the ethical relation of

responsibility for the other at the centre of the host-guest encounter. But, rather than insisting on the view of a conscious and intentionally respectful relationship among people, as is arguably the case in most intercultural education scholarship (for a discussion see Ferri, 2014), it argued that responsibility is issued neither from universal consciousness nor from a will of one's own. Otherwise, both self and other would be placed on one continuum of cultural values that would ultimately abolish the radical alterity of both. Several education philosophers (e.g. Biesta, 2003; Egéa-Kuehne, 2001; Todd, 2003; Trifonas, 2003) have made a similar point when questioning the idea of the knowing ego as the locus of all responsibility, and together call pedagogues to abandon some of the most trusty principles of intercultural education theory and practice.

Undoubtedly, a range of reasons may have encouraged education philosophers to make this call. It may be, as Kymlicka (2003) and Coulby (2006) observe, that the subject relies heavily on tokenistic and undemanding models of culture learning, or that it suffers from several theoretical weaknesses that have not, as yet, captured the attention of interested parties. For example, Usher and Edwards (1994) have argued, over twenty years ago, that educational theory and practice is founded upon the problematic discourse of modernity, in which the other is acknowledged only in order to be possessed, and that policy makers are not acutely aware of the dangers that this discourse hides. In the same vein, according to recent intercultural research (e.g. Aman, 2013; Blasco, 2012), the overwhelming majority of related courses resonates sympathetically with the development of a global consciousness that can allegedly resolve some of the most pressing problems of our time. To be more precise, MacDonald and O'Regan (2013) provide evidence of an unstated movement towards wholeness, which, rather than preserving the radical otherness of the other, resolves



all difference in favour of moral absolutism. In this way, the other is forced to adapt to the situation of the same, despite having been acknowledged as an equal partner according to the liberal claims of tolerance. This paper noted the logical corollary of this suggestion in that it showed that tolerance operates within a number of normative principles, especially when it encounters forms of deviant behaviour. Consequently, if our aim is to design courses that do not diminish alterity in the name of some kind of higher order truth, we may have to acknowledge that there is not just one morality, and that moralities exist only within the world of possible lived experience.

Most importantly, the courses we ought to design must remain radically open to different alternatives. For, as Derrida (1995, p. 239) has so aptly put it, ‘the only attitude [...] I would *absolutely* condemn is one which, directly or indirectly, cuts off the possibility of an essentially interminable questioning’. Saying, therefore, that we already know what a good intercultural pedagogy should look like not only leads to the suppression of the other, but also cancels the task of infinite analysis, which each one of us has to undertake as part of a necessarily reflective pedagogic practice. The ethics of hospitality play an important role in this practice, because, in addition to enabling a critical re-thinking of the ideals of individual autonomy and critical reason, they interrogate the normative goals carried in the educational language of modernity. Education philosophers, such as Biesta (2006) and Trifonas (2000), have already shown how these goals are interrogated when drawing attention to the idea of seeing oneself as another. However, with the current policy emphasis on skills and competences as preconditions of the ethical, their perspectives remain largely ignored in mainstream discussions of intercultural education theory and practice. By providing a combined theorisation of tolerance and hospitality in this paper, I hope to have given intercultural educators good enough reasons for the adoption of alternative

educational perspectives, and to have helped them see that the radical ethical basis for peace and dialogue is not tolerance, but hospitality.

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